Exploring Hawaiian Sovereignty: "Missionary Influence in Hawai'i 1820-1850"

By Anthony Castanha

Writer's Note: The following article is a continuation of our series on Hawaiian sovereignty. With 1993 marking the 100th anniversary of the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, HPP is examining and providing its readers with some background on this issue. Our series has previously focused on ancient Hawaiian history, the legacy of Captain Cook and Kamehameha the Great.

Writer-historian Laura Fish and Dr. Gerrit P. Judd, physician and member of the third company of missionaries, arrived in Honolulu March 30, 1828. By April 1842, he severed his connection with the mission and took a job with the Hawaiian Government as official translator and recorder. In 1843, he became secretary of state for foreign affairs and in 1845 he was appointed minister of interior. Printed in *Ka Leo O Hawai'i*. Bishop Museum Press

Enormous changes took place in the Hawaiian kingdom after the death of Kamehameha in 1819. Liholiho (Kamehameha II) and Kaahumanu assumed leadership as co-rulers and almost immediately abolished much of the kapu system. It is certain that when nothing bad befell Westerners who violated the kapu's strict laws, Hawaiians may have lost faith in their gods (Kuykendall p. 597). This spiritual void would thus create a "golden opportunity" for the arrival of the first Christian missionaries.

The first missionaries to Hawai'i arrived from New England on March 30, 1820. They were sent to the islands by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, an interdenominational body whose membership was principally Presbyterian and Congregational. Interest in spreading the Christian faith to the islands had been generated by reports from traders and several native youths who had been brought back to New England. These young Hawaiians were educated at the Foreign Mission School and were among the first group of missionaries to arrive here. Also included were two ordained ministers, Hiram Bingham of Vermont and Asa Thurston of Massachusetts, and several lay workers, including a farmer, two teachers, a printer and a physician (Commission p. 154). This first mission was instructed by the Board of Commissioners, as stated by Kuykendall in *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, "to aim at nothing short of covering those islands with fruitful fields and pleasant dwellings, and schools and churches; of raising up the whole people to an elevated state of Christian civilization; of bringing, or preparing the means of bringing, thousands and millions of the present and succeeding generations to the mansions of eternal blessedness" (p. 101).

We must remember that these particular missionaries came out of "puritan" New England with their primary objective the conversion of the Hawaiian population to Christianity. Allan Beekman, in a 1945 article titled *HIRAM BINGHAM: The Man Who Made Hawaiians Ashamed* published in *New Pacific* magazine, describes some typical attitudes and stereotypes of the first missionaries to Hawai'i. Rev. Bingham, in his own words, explained the missionary objective which in going "among those barbarians, amid the privations and suffering to which they would be exposed, in so rude, so dark, so vile a part of the world as they knew the Sandwich Islands to be" was "to honor God by making known His will, and to benefit those heathen tribes, by making them acquainted with the turn of life-to turn them from their follies and crimes, idolatries and oppressions, to the service and enjoyment of the living God, and adorable Redeemer" (p. 9). One would, even at this period in history much less today, surely agree that Rev. Bingham wasn't a very culturally humane individual.

Having arrived at Kailua on the coast of the Big Island, Liholiho said that the missionaries could remain for a year on a trial basis. They were also given permission to have a "station" in Honolulu. However, before having a chance at success in converting the *maka'ainana* (commoners), the king demanded that they first teach him and his *ali'i* (chiefs) and also become familiar with the Hawaiian language (Kuykendall pp. 103-104). This was done. The friendly relationship developed between the two allowed the missionaries to stay on longer.

The principal means used to accomplish their work was through preaching (religious instruction being the most important), teaching and printing (Kuykendall p. 102). A number of powerful ali'i were among the first converts, but spiritual results in substantial numbers came slowly, lagging behind educational achievements (Kuykendall p. 104). Much time and effort was spent teaching and developing the Hawaiian language in written form. Of other works accomplished, according to Lawrence H. Fuchs in *Hawaii Pono: A Social History*, the missionaries "set up the first printing press west of the Rockies, established schools throughout the islands, printed textbooks, translated the bible into Hawaiian, and promoted constitutional government under the Kingdom" (Commission p. 155).

Success in education could be attributed to the large number of Hawaiians enrolled in schools and the recorded high literacy rates (Commission p. 155). Nevertheless, it is unclear and still debated whether this activity was of benefit to native Hawaiians. Kuykendall has written that by 1831 or 1832 the educational system had reached its peak. The common schools of the time had maximized their potential, "the novelty had worn off, and the people lost interest in them" (p. 109). Fuchs also iterates that "the missionaries did have a tremendous [educational] impact; and, by speeding the process of social change, they contributed to the psychological demoralization of the Hawaiians. The Hawaiian language, dance, and art were degraded. The land, property, political and religious systems were under constant attack..." (Commission p. 155).

Regardless, by 1840 Hawai'i was officially a Christian nation. During the first 17 years, the missionaries were very cautious in converting Hawaiians to membership in the church. Strict rules of discipline allowed less than 1,300 persons admission. However, during the period of the "great revival," from June 1837 to June 1840, Hawaiian churches admitted nearly 20,000 members (approximately one-fifth of the Hawaiian population then). Remarkably, out of the 19 churches existing in 1840, three-fifths of the admitted memberships were converted at but two stations (Hilo and Waimea) on the Big Island. It is stated that two pastors, Titus Coan of Hilo and Lorenzo Lyons of Waimea, "baptized converts literally by hundreds, and admitted them to the church in the same wholesale fashion" (Kuykendall 115).

Perhaps criticism of the missionary role in Hawai'i is offered most harshly by Herman Melville in his classic novel *Typee* (1846), with reference to the Marquesans of the South Pacific.

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"Better it will be for them (the Marquesans) to remain the happy and innocent heathens and barbarians that they now are, than, like the wretched inhabitants of the Sandwich Islands, to enjoy the mere name of Christians without experiencing any of the vital operations of true religion, whilst at the same time they are made the victims of the worst vices and evils of civilized life" (Frear/*Anti-Missionary Criticism*).

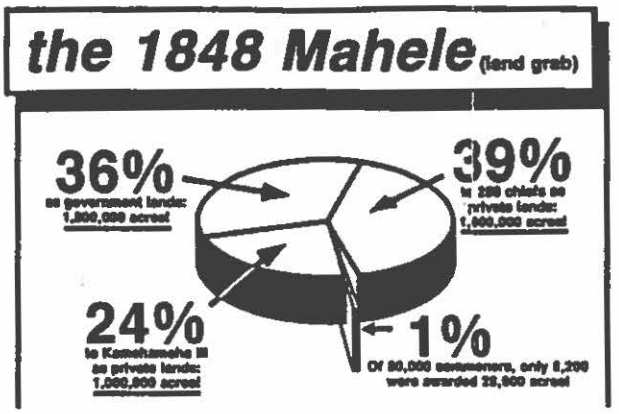
Although often deplored for their austerity, narrowness and intolerance of ideas and views, these pioneer missionary "children of God" strongly believed their purposes to be noble and worthy. Kuykendall says how the missionaries had been reminded by those who had sent them that their mission was "for no private end, for no earthly object;" that they had come "wholly for the good of others, and for the glory of God our savior" (p. 101).

The role the missionaries played in influencing Hawai'i's transfer to a market economy was very significant. The first half of the 19th century saw the development of the sandalwood trade and the origin of the whaling industry, along with the continual growth of commerce in the islands. This in itself may be respectable, but at whose expense? According to Haunani-Kay Trask, "Hawai'i's period of mercantilism, with its service-based commerce, saw the rise of an entrepreneurial class of foreigners—New Englanders and Europeans, ministers, doctors, and businessmen, who possessed the skill and aggressive values needed to triumph in a competitive, profit-oriented market economy. They looked upon Hawai'i not as a nation belonging to others of a different, more cooperative culture but as a money-making opportunity through which they could amass riches, status, and eventually political control. The plight of the Hawaiians and the larger moral question of the destruction of a whole people and their culture posed no serious problems to this class" (Commission p. 725).

In an article titled *Land Tenure in Hawaii*, University of Hawaii anthropologist and assistant professor Marian Kelly writes that by 1838 the sandalwood trade was dying out and it had become increasingly difficult for the ali'i and the maka'ainana to pay their debts to foreigners. Fears and rumors that the Hawaiian kingdom would be overtaken by a foreign country increased. In desperation, the king and ali'i sought the help and advice of their friends, the missionaries (Amerasia Journal p. 59). Further developments in the 1840s found many missionaries, who had already devoted years of service to the Mission, for reasons of providing for family and the education of their children, compelled to return to the United States. The obvious drawback for the American Board of Commissioners in Boston would be the loss of influence, be it religious or otherwise, in Hawai'i. The board's policy up to this point had prevented its missionary members from acquiring property and "rooting themselves in the soil of the islands" (Kuykendall p. 340). This policy would change.

The Rev. William Richards was, in 1838, the first missionary to detach himself from the Mission and join the government. He served as chaplain, teacher and translator; and he daily lectured the king and ali'i about the political economy. It is without doubt that his influence, instructing them from a text written by free trade advocate Francis Wayland, accelerated changes in the government of Kamehameha III. In 1842, a medical missionary named Gerrit P. Judd was appointed "Translator and Recorder" for the government at a salary of $760 per year. He was soon appointed to the position of Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Amerasia Journal p. 59-W). Many other missionaries also relinquished their ties with the Mission and gained top posts in the Hawaiian government. This influence had a very crucial impact on the future of Hawai'i.

Increased control of power in government affairs led the missionaries to counteract what became referred to as the "homeward current" in the Mission. "The missionaries in their general meeting adopted a report recommending that 'every obstacle be removed, which can be consistently, to the permanent residence of the present missionaries with their families, at the Islands.' At nearly the same moment, the American Board in Boston was devising a plan intended to accomplish the very object sought by the missionaries" (Kuykendall p. 340). Missionary influence now would seep steadily into all facets of political life as Russ, in *The Hawaiian Revolution*, states, "A strong and aggressive foreign element, mainly American, purloined political power from the Kanakas [natives], and made itself wealthy by entering business, trade and commerce. Although most of them were no longer missionaries, they were called the 'Missionary Party'—in derision—by the natives who saw themselves being progressively relegated to the rear" (Commission p. 155).



The Great Mahele, which converted most native Hawaiian lands into private ownership, was engineered by chief architects, Gerrit P. Judd, founder of Punahou Schools. Graphic by Ka Leo O Hawai'i

Perhaps the most important event in Hawaiian history with direct missionary control, which alienated and disenfranchised the native Hawaiian population, was *The Great Mahele* of 1848. The Mahele, whose chief architect was Dr. Judd, with the help of Rev. Richards, converted most Hawaiian lands into private property. Kelly has written, "It was the Americans, Rev. William Richards and Dr. Gerrit P. Judd, who drew up the plan called the 'mahele.' They convinced the Hawaiian king and the chiefs of the Privy Council to accept it. They told the Hawaiians that if they didn't convert to private ownership of land, any foreign invader that annexed the Hawaiian Islands would not recognize Hawaiian land rights. They said a foreign invader would take over everything, leaving the king, chiefs and Hawaiian people landless" (Commission p. 726).

In 1845, Kamehameha III, after mounting pressure by the missionaries and American businessmen to transfer the land system, finally gave in and created a land commission for study and review. The ensuing acts of the Mahele divided the lands as follows: 39 percent, 1.6 million acres, went to 250 chiefs as private lands; 36 percent, 1.5 million acres, went as government lands; 24 percent, 1 million acres, went

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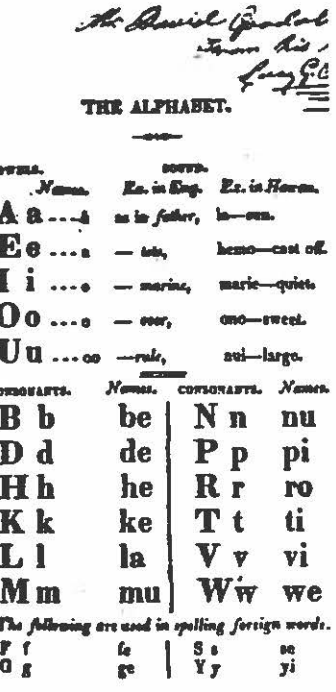

THE ALPHABET.

VOWELS. Name.	SOUND. As in Eng.	As in Germ.
A a	a as in father,	la—sun.
E e	— ate,	hemo—cast off.
I i	— marine,	marie—quiet.
O o	— over,	ono—sweet.
U u	—rule,	nui—large.

CONSONANTS.	Names.	CONSONANTS.	Names.
B b	be	N n	nu
D d	de	P p	pi
H h	he	R r	ro
K k	ke	T t	ti
L l	la	V v	vi
M m	mu	W w	we

The following are used in spelling foreign words.

F f	fe	S s	se
G g	ge	Y y	yi

This is the first page of the speller printed in September, 1822 (actual size). Hawaiian Mission Children's Society

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to Kamehameha III as private lands (known today as the "crown" lands), and less than 1 percent of the land, 28,600 acres, was awarded to 8,200 commoners out of 80,000 that were still alive in 1850. The professed justification for the division was to preserve the rights of the people while providing lands for the needs of foreigners. This obviously failed (Commission p. 726).

Kelly further offers this explanation for the Hawaiian peoples' loss of land. "The primary reason why Hawaiians 'lost' their land is that the large majority of Hawaiian people never received fee simple title deeds to land. It was never made theirs to lose, so they never could have been responsible for having 'lost' it. Instead, it was legally 'stolen' from them by passing laws that nullified the traditional land use rights of the majority of the people, who at the same time were screened out of the new land tenure system. Thus, the maka'ainana received less than 1 percent of the land, although they comprised over [more than] 99 percent of the Hawaiian population. In contrast, the ali'i, less than 1 percent of the population, received nearly all of the land, including the government land, which was controlled by the chiefs and foreigners who were in the government" (Amerasia Journal p. 66).

Once the Mahele and the Kuleana Act of 1850 were completed, much of Hawai'i's lands became "up for sale." Foreign investors were able now to purchase vast acreage of land from either the maka'ainana, who were starving because they had become separated as a group and couldn't successfully cultivate the small plots they had received, if any, or from the ali'i and the king, who were enormously indebted to Western businessmen. The outcome resulted in vast quantities of land, an abundance of the choicest property available, secured under Western ownership (Commission p. 726).

The advent of the sugar industry, which required large sums of land, capital and labor, followed. Direct missionary influence here was great. As Trask states, "The white owner/manager included ex-missionaries, such as Samuel Alexander and Henry Baldwin, Walter Rice, S. N. Castle, and Amos Starr Cooke, as well as newcomers to the scene, James Campbell and T. H. Davies. These businessmen and others were quick to profit from a situation they had themselves created. Indeed, the large-scale cultivation of sugar rapidly became the monopoly of this group. They were the firms of Alexander and Baldwin, Castle and Cooke, T. H. Davies, C. Brewer and Co., and Hackfield and Co., later renamed American Factors (Amfac). They came to be known as the infamous Big Five—controllers of Hawai'i's destiny from the last half of the 19th century through the middle of the 20th century" (Commission p. 727).

The irony of the missionary experience in Hawai'i became obscure at an early date. In a 1926 magazine article titled *The Millionaire "Missionaries" of Hawaii*, Jeannette and Frederick Murray express, "One wonders why the history of the millionaire 'missionaries' is so obscure in America. Many books have been written on the islands. In these they are always mentioned, but with only a passing reference, not withstanding the fact that they have played a most important role in Hawaiian history. The reason may be that church writers, unable to make a satisfactory explanation as to why these children and grandchildren are in possession of the lands their fathers christianized, have, in their embarrassment, omitted all mention of the present day situation, confining themselves to the missionary labors of the pioneer fathers" (p. 4).

The missionaries surely did some good in Hawai'i, but they also did quite well. There were, naturally, good if not great men in the religious order who meant well. At a time when many were reaping their sugar profits, one of these men, Father Damien de Veuster, was fulfilling his missionary role which was truly "for no private end, for no earthly object, wholly for the good of others."

(To be continued)

The New 1993 Toyota Corolla Debuts

Toyota-Hawaii introduced the all-new 1993 Corolla last month, marking the 25th year of Corolla in the United States during which time Toyota has sold 4 million Corollas.

For better passenger protection, the '93 Corolla has a driver-side air bag standard, front and rear crush zones, side impact beams in the doors, a three-point seat belt system and optional anti-lock brakes. The Corolla has been widened for more hip and shoulder room. It also has integrated color-keyed bumpers, a sporty grille, composite halogen head lamps and full case-mounted door handles.

The new Corolla 1.8-liter engine, with 16 valves and a Double Overhead Cam, produces 115 horsepower @ 5600 rpm and torque of 115 @ 2800 rpm. The '93 Corolla is available as a standard sedan, deluxe sedan, deluxe station wagon and LE sedan.

New Child & Family Service Staff Positions Filled

Marge Kam

Helene Robin

Child and Family Service, Hawai'i's largest privately-funded human service organization, announced the creation and filling of two positions. **Marge Kam** has been appointed as senior development officer in the new Development and Community Relations Division. She will direct the annual giving program and will be responsible for donor recognition and benefits for community organizations, businesses and individuals. Kam has previously served as development director for the Historic Hawaii Foundation and as development officer for the University of Hawaii Foundation and the Honolulu Symphony.

Helene C. Robin is the new vice president, human resources. She will guide the development of an organization-wide recruiting, hiring and training program. Robin will also oversee employee relations issues, develop motivational programs and manage job classification, compensation and benefits programs. She is a graduate of Loyola Marymount University and has 14 years of experience in human resource management.